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Onward Precarity, Mobility and Migration among Latin Americans in London

Cathy McIlwaine

Kings's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS

cathy.mcilwaine@kcl.ac.uk

Diego Bunge

Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS

d.bunge@qmul.ac.uk

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Abstract

Contributing to debates around the relationships between precarity, mobilities and migration, this paper examines the nature of precarity among onward Latin American (OLAs) migrants as they have moved transnationally to multiple destinations from their homelands to southern Europe and onwards to London across different time periods. Drawing on primary research with over 400 OLAs, the discussion highlights how precarity maps onto onward migration trajectories in fractal rather than linear ways. In moving beyond a continuum approach to labour exploitation, the paper develops the concept of “onward precarity” to capture how migrants negotiate intersecting vulnerabilities in holistic spatio-temporal ways as they move through different structural contexts across the world from origin, through transition to their final destination country over time. These negotiations are underpinned by multiple agentic tactics that revolve around resilience and reworking strategies as onward migrants traverse wider structures of disadvantage in situ and through mobility in different places.

Key words

Latin Americans, onward migration, migrant labour, precarity, transnational

Introduction

The relationships between precarious employment, exploitation and migration are dynamic and diverse (Strauss and McGrath 2017). Such are the complexities inherent in these processes that more research engagement around these intersections in relation to structural economic transformations, immigration regimes and migrants' responses remains vital (Buckley et al 2017). As migrants continue to buttress the economies of many countries as a 'migrant division of labour' has emerged (Wills et al 2010), it is widely recognised that labour exploitation invariably intensifies when precarious work coincides with insecure immigration status (Anderson 2010). This has produced, among other things, 'hyper-precarity' and various forms of 'unfree labour' (Strauss 2017; Lewis et al 2015). It is also acknowledged that there are diverse types of precarious and exploitative employment often conceptualised from a continuum approach that delineates a range of circumstances from free to forced or unfree labour (Skrivankova 2010; Waite 2009). While this usefully challenges binary thinking about precarious work and migration and incorporates those with varied legal status, research from this perspective tends to focus on those with limited citizenship rights and working under specific labour conditions such as temporary worker programmes at a given time (Lewis et al 2015).

Another key aspect of these debates relates to the intersections between exploitative labour and different forms of mobilities/immobilities in terms of movements across space and within labour markets as well as specific strategies developed over time as migrants negotiate their "migration project" (Bastia and McGrath 2011; Waite and Lewis 2017). Embedded in these processes are various forms of mobility bargaining power and "spatialized agency" which denote how migrants can or cannot use exit, entry and stasis in labour markets by choice or constraint (Buckley et al 2017:155). Mobility pathways are not only occupational but also geographical and relate to how migrants move in relation to structural exigencies linked with economic change and state-imposed immigration controls (Strauss and McGrath 2017). However, again, research tends to focus on migrants' experiences of precarious work in a given place over time (Waite et al 2015), or within a particular employment sector (Alberti 2014) and/or among a specific type of migrant group according to immigration status. Therefore, there remains scope to develop a more holistically spatial and transnational perspective on the nature of these mobilities in relation to unfree labour and precarity (Strauss 2017), especially among migrants with a range of different rights. This is particularly

pertinent to the lives of onward migrants where their migration trajectories entail multiple steps and routes without a predetermined destination (Mas Giralt 2017).

This paper addresses these issues in relation to Latin American onward migrants or what we denote as “onward Latin Americans” (OLAs) moving from southern Europe (mainly Spain) to London, the majority of whom have EU citizenship on arrival (if not when they first arrive in Europe). We show how labour exploitation and other forms of precarity are experienced by OLAs in a range of ways across multiple migrant trajectories as they have moved from their origins in Latin American countries to transit countries in southern Europe and onwards to their final destination in London. The paper suggests that the notion of “onward precarity” can capture how onward migrants negotiate multiple migration and labour regimes transnationally across borders in conditions of precarity in fractal rather than linear ways. In contrast to a continuum approach which tends to focus on the types of labour precarity experienced by migrants among a specific group and often in a specific occupation sector, onward precarity allows for exploration of such exploitation in a more holistic spatio-temporal context that focuses on the intersections between multiple precarities within and beyond the labour market and in relation to different forms of mobilities across space and as well as socially and occupationally. These dynamics are underpinned by a combination of structural transformations and mobilization responses among migrants to these changes in contexts of precarity. In turn, onward precarity is also undergirded by transnational tactics (Datta et al 2007) developed by migrants to deal with their precarious circumstances (Mas Giralt 2017) which may reflect forms of “resistance within unfreedom” (Waite et al 2015:483) or tactics of survival (Bloch 2013; also Wills et al 2010). In extending Katz’s (2004) conceptualization of resistance, resilience and reworking strategies, the tactics developed by onward migrants are shown to operate only on relation to the latter two but over multiple scales as they negotiate their precarity in different places.

Following an assessment of current conceptual debates around precarity, mobility and onward migration, the paper then contextualizes these in relation to the Latin American community in London. It then maps the intersections between transnational migration and precarity among onward migrants according to the broad flows of Latin American migrants across three scales of movement as they leave their home countries, transition through Europe and then move onwards to their final destination in the United Kingdom (UK). The paper then concludes by outlining how it contributes to debates around clarifying emerging notions

of onward precarities and mobilities from a holistic perspective as migrants move across multiple borders over time through the notion of “onward precarity”.

Conceptualising Precarity, Mobility and Onward Migration

Migrant labour increasingly underpins the functioning of economies across the world. With roots in Marxist notions around how immigration is functional to capitalism, a “migrant division of labour” has emerged whereby a flexible migrant workforce is actively employed in elementary jobs with concomitant poor working conditions and where workers can be hired, fired and/or deported depending on labour demand (May et al 2007; Wills et al 2010). This migrant workforce, many of whom move from the global South, is inherently dynamic in terms of workers moving in and out of temporary jobs, as well as stretching across countries as part of transnational social spaces (McIlwaine 2012; McIlwaine and Ryburn 2018). Yet it is also characterised by precarity especially when migrants have insecure immigration status (McIlwaine 2015).

While precarity refers to a situation of insecurity, uncertainty and risk derived from the French *précarité* (Waite 2009), a distinction is usually made between “precarious work and precarious lives” (Lewis et al 2015:584) and in effect, two different camps of thinking (Strauss 2017:3). The latter is often associated both with Butler’s (2009:ii) delineation of a precarious life as suffering from failing networks of support and a visceral exposure to injury, violence and death and Ettlinger’s (2007:320) conceptualisation denoting a “condition of vulnerability relative to contingency and the inability to predict”. The specific relationship between precarity and employment dates back to Bourdieu’s research on workers in Algeria in the late 1960s and expounded in terms of the casualization of work in 1990s France (Millar 2017) as well as to debates on marginality and informalisation in the global South (Munck 2013). This has evolved into conceptualising precarity as a labour condition linked with neoliberal restructuring and globalisation (Kalleberg 2009) or from Standing’s (2011) perspective, as a class or category denoted as the “precariat”. Critiques revolve around the fact that precarity is not a specific outcome of post-Fordist labour relations (Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Waite 2009), and the precariat is not an undifferentiated class not least because precarity can also be experienced by elite professional classes (Munck 2013). More nuanced interpretations have also emerged that recognise context-specificities of precarity that can be viewed as highly exploitative as well as potentially more positive (Miller 2017).

A core dimension of understanding precarious work in relation to migration has been advanced through a continuum approach to labour exploitation. This entails moving beyond the binary of forced and free labour to encompass a diversity of labour violations ranging from breaches of contract to modern slavery (Skrivankova 2010). Low-paid and especially irregular migrants, often experience the most severe exploitation and “unfreedoms”, sometimes referred to as “hyper-precarity” (Lewis et al 2015; see also Waite and Lewis 2017 on “transactional labour”). While a continuum approach has been invaluable in capturing the multidimensionality of exploitative labour circumstances among migrants, it has been critiqued for failing to deconstruct specific categories such as unfreedom and precarious employment (Strauss and McGrath 2017), for neglecting intersections with wider dimensions of precarity (Millar 2017) and its gendered nature (Vosko 2010). In turn, there is scope for focusing more on migrants with varied legal rights (Lewis et al 2015) as well as more explicit consideration of the socio-temporal spatialities of labour exploitation among migrants (Strauss 2017).

While there have been some attempts to address some aspects of these criticisms through such notions as “transnational precarity”, albeit not within a continuum approach, these tend to consider a specific type of temporary migration within one occupational sector (see Hennebry 2014). In the current context, we suggest that there is scope to examine the transnational dimensions of precarity within a much broader spatio-temporal multidirectional context among onward migrants from varied origins, with complex citizenship rights and who have migrated across multiple borders. Onward migration refers to how migration entails multiple destinations, steps and routes that are not predetermined and encapsulate numerous migration trajectories (Mas Giralt 2017). While research on onward migration has explored relationships with precarity, it usually identifies it as a coping strategy to address failures of integration and discrimination (ibid; Kelly and Hedman 2016). Onward migration is also acknowledged as rooted in various motivations (Ahrens et al 2016) at different stages of migrants’ life course (Ramos 2017), with the focus on minimising precarity, facilitating aspirations and ensuring livelihood well-being (Mas Giralt 2017). There is less work on the specifically transnational dimensions across multiple borders in terms of mapping how onward precarity underpins the entire migration project (Bastia and McGrath 2011) and how this intersects with structural economic change and various forms of agentic tactics and practices.

Debates around agency among migrants and migrant workers in particular often concentrate on forms of mobility bargaining power and “spatialized agency” (Buckley et al 2017:155). While spatial mobility can represent some form of liberation or at least some hope for a better life for workers, it can also lead to other forms of oppression (Rogaly 2009:1979 citing Harvey 1982; also Reid-Musson 2014). Also, the exercise of migrant worker agency does not automatically lead to collective organisation or mobilisation and instead is more likely to emerge through complex incremental and constrained practices across space and time (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Waite 2009). Indeed, it has also been shown that immobility in labour markets can also constitute resistance, especially when migrants do not have full citizenship rights (Bastia and McGrath 2011). Whereas some argue that the precariat is unable to engender social change (Standing 2011), others have suggested that ‘resistance within unfreedom’ (Waite et al 2015:483) is possible. Such strategies can entail challenging workplace abuses through various types of resilience, reworking and resistance in situ, over time and through mobility across space (ibid; Katz 2004; also Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011). These can overtly and covertly challenge power relations within and beyond labour markets through concerted collective action or much more subtle tactics across productive and reproductive spheres that allows migrants to cope with and occasionally unequal labour markets and confront social exclusion (Datta et al 2007; Mas Giralt 2017; Paret and Gleeson 2016). Such practices are also developed to negotiate immigration controls thus rejecting notions of migrants as victims of increasingly securitised borders (McIlwaine 2015; also Bloch 2013).

In recognising that precarity is not inherently immobilising, Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013:189), writing from the autonomy of migration perspective, note that “migrant labour becomes increasingly precarised ... and precarious labour becomes increasingly mobile”. Alberti (2014:877-8) develops this in relation to temporary workers in London and shows that, while not universal, some migrants manage to move occupationally and engage in new migration through a form of “transnational exit power” to escape poor working conditions which is itself a form of “transnational mobility power” where migrants’ mobility and temporariness can generate forms of resistance to their conditions. Whereas Alberti (2014) focuses on a specific type of migrant labour in one sector, the current paper focuses on “onward precarity” in order to highlight the spatialities of how onward migrants deal with precarity over space and time in complex and non-linear ways as they negotiate multiple

labour markets, occupational sectors and citizenship statuses challenging many aspects of the continuum approach.

Contextualising Latin American Transnational Migration to London

Latin Americans have been recognised as an increasingly important migrant group in London and the UK more widely. Although they first arrived in the 1970s as exiles, asylum seekers, students and economic migrants, it was not until the turn of the millennium that significant numbers settled. Those from Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina paved the way as exiles, while Peruvians, Ecuadorians and especially Colombians constituted important flows in the 1990s and 2000s followed by burgeoning numbers of Bolivians and Brazilians (McIlwaine et al 2011). The 2011 census shows that more than two-thirds of Latin Americans moved to London after 2000, with only 12 per cent arriving prior to 1989. Brazilians are the most recent with over 80 per cent arriving since 2000 compared to only half of Colombians who are much more established (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016:22). While early migration to London entailed movement directly from Latin America, this has steadily become more transnational involving secondary and onward movement via southern Europe. In 2010, for example, 36.5 percent of Latin Americans had lived elsewhere before moving to London with Spain being the most common prior destination (McIlwaine 2012:293).

The most recent estimates of the size of the Latin American population in the UK stand at 250,000 in 2013, of which around 145,000 were in London making them the second fastest growing non-EU migrant population in London (after Chinese). Brazilians are the largest nationality group in the city (38 per cent of all Latin Americans), followed by Colombians (23 per cent). Latin Americans in London are youthful, with two-thirds aged under 40, and well-educated to tertiary level education (more than half). However, 17 per cent struggle with speaking English which affects their occupational status; although employment rates are high at almost 70 per cent, around half work in elementary, service, caring and processing jobs (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016).

The research on which this paper is based draws especially on x's engagement with the Latin American population in London since 2004 through various community-based participatory projects and volunteering with three migrant groups as a trustee and advisor since 2006 (for example, McIlwaine 2010, 2012, 2015). The research outlined here was conducted in partnership with the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS), a feminist

organisation providing services for Latin American women in London. Following a project that provided the first population estimate and profile of the community (McIlwaine et al 2011), the research here followed-up with an updated population estimate and research on recent flows of Latin Americans arriving. This entailed a survey conducted in 2014 and 2015 with 400 OLAs in London who had previously lived in another European country, together with 28 qualitative interviews with onward migrants and representatives from organisations serving this population (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016).

The survey was conducted by a team of eight Latin American community researchers in partnership with LAWRS. This team included a range of people from different Latin American nationalities who had different networks and entry points into the community. Mirroring the method used in the previous project, we ran a training workshop with the researchers followed with weekly monitoring by Bunge with Cate Trejos from LAWRS who reviewed all the questionnaires conducted in the previous week in order to reflect the approximate nationality proportions known to exist (weighted towards Colombians, Ecuadorians and Brazilians), as well as gender balance. This purposive sampling aimed at including people from different socio-economic and ethnicities who were accessed through existing contacts (including work and church networks), community organizations (LAWRS and others), recruitment at community events such as fiestas and summer carnivals and snowballing. All questionnaires were carried out face-to-face in Spanish and Portuguese and elicited information on arrival, occupational status and working conditions, income, health status, access to services, housing and household structures. For every person approached, approximately two-thirds agreed to complete the survey. The migrant interviews were conducted by Carolina Velásquez and Yara Evans, with whom McIlwaine had worked in previous projects, with the authors conducting the organisational interviews. The migrant interviews (recruited through those who had indicated willingness to be interviewed after completing the questionnaire and who fitted the sampling frame) all lasted around one hour. These included 15 women and 13 men from Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Peru, Cuba, Guatemala, Uruguay and the Dominican Republic. While the oldest interviewee was 61 and the youngest 15, the rest were aged in their 30s and 40s and worked in jobs representative of typical labour market locations for OLAs. All interviewees were anonymised with no identifying characteristics included in transcripts. They covered the above topics in more depth also addressing issues such as belonging, gender relations, meanings of home. The Spanish-speaking interviews were transcribed and coded in Spanish

while the Portuguese ones were transcribed and coded into English. While these were analysed by the authors, we also ran an analysis workshop with the community researchers once the interviews were completed where they discussed the challenges and initial findings and which fed into the policy report produced for LAWRS and the funders (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016).

Ostensibly, this approach entailed a series of multiple “insiders” and “outsiders” undertaking the fieldwork where such a dichotomous positionality was blurred in practice. Instead, it encompassed what Ryan (2015) refers to as “multiple positionalities” or “third” or “hybrid positionalities” (Carling et al 2014). While Ryan (2015) relates this to the multiple identities of an individual researcher as they navigate the politics of research, in this case, it refers to the multi-nationality research team itself. Clearly there are drawbacks to such an approach in terms of how interview subjects responded to peer researchers and insiders/outsiders, how language was negotiated as well as the role of the organisation within this process (Court and Abbas 2014). Indeed, some issues emerged in the analysis such as the need to signpost survey respondents and interviewees to various organisations when they asked for help and the need to decipher varied perceptions among different nationality and language groups as well as other social identities within the Latin American community (see also McIlwaine 2010) (see below).

Mapping Transnational Migration and Labour Precarity among Onward Migrants

A transnational perspective is essential in understanding the complex interplay between the nature of Latin American onward migration to and within Europe, labour market exploitation and precarity. Such migration, which is becoming increasingly characteristic within Europe, is diverse in terms of nationalities, social identities, socio-economic status and motivations, and is increasingly characterised by multiple routes underpinned by dynamic migratory careers (Martiniello and Rea 2014; Ramos 2017). Yet many analyses of onward migration neglect the home country situation focusing instead on the reasons for onward movement. Understanding OLAs in London therefore requires consideration of the economic situation in three parts of the globe (Latin America, southern Europe and northern Europe), together with the nature of their immigration regimes across three broad temporal transitions (1990s-2000 economic recession, pre-2008 growth, post-2008 global downturn).

Onward Precarity: Leaving Latin America

Precarity has long been pervasive in Latin American countries in economic, political and social ways, albeit not always identified as such (Munck 2013). Associated with deep-seated economic inequalities, armed conflict and political violence often engendered through authoritarian rule as well as complex racial, class and gender divides, precarity has been at the root of migration movements from the continent (Durand and Massey 2010). More specifically, migration from Latin America to Europe burgeoned in the 1990s and especially after 2001 as the United States (US) became a less realistic option post 9/11 with marked inflows to Spain, Portugal, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, France, and Germany particularly from Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia (McIlwaine 2011:4). At this time, these processes were underpinned by the economic crises associated with neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programmes and the “Lost Decade” in Latin America, coupled with political upheaval and armed conflict in some countries such as Colombia (McIlwaine and Datta 2014; McIlwaine 2014). By 2000, Spain was the most favoured European destination for Latin Americans, enabled by labour demand in domestic work, construction and agriculture, shared language and a series of immigration regularisation programmes (McIlwaine 2012).

In the current research, nearly four out of five OLAs left their home country between 1996 and 2007 with 41 per cent leaving between 2001 and 2007. While migration was rooted in a range of overlapping factors, almost half stated that they left for economic reasons linked with unemployment, lack of professional opportunities or to establish a business. Just under one-fifth (16 per cent) left because family or friends had encouraged them, while 9 per cent were seeking a better future for their family, with 7 per cent leaving for political reasons. For example, 45 year-old Jacinto from Colombia who was an engineer, spoke of his work as head of systems in a paper mill. In the late 1990s, the company went bankrupt and while he began to work freelance, he found it difficult to make ends meet for himself and his family. Economic instability led to indebtedness, and when combined with personal problems, he decided to move to Spain where he began working as a waiter. Therefore, Jacinto’s experiences of labour precarity in Colombia lay primarily in the instabilities of his professional freelance work which prompted his migration abroad. Indeed, almost a third of OLAs worked in jobs requiring qualifications prior to leaving Latin America, of which 21 per cent were professional and managerial occupations. Only 2 per cent were employed in cleaning and another 2 per cent in caring jobs, with only 1.5 per cent employed in construction or agricultural work.

While the precariousness of work in Latin America affected all classes, it *was* gendered. Although women were more likely to have worked in qualified occupations than men (32 per cent compared with 27 per cent), they consistently noted the failure of employers to adhere to maternity legislation compounded by the lack of childcare provision as well as pressure to leave the labour market after childbirth. Helena, 32, from Ecuador recalled how she had been employed in a workshop machine-knitting sweaters for ten hours a day. After falling pregnant, she left her job after five months because sitting for long periods was undermining her health and because her boss told her she would lose her job once the baby was born. Her mother and aunt advised her to go to Spain: “they said, go, you will have better opportunities now that you have a daughter. You can work there and you can’t work here, buy a little house and then return”. The precarity of Helena’s work in Ecuador therefore lay not only in long working hours, but also in the lack of social protection and explicitly gendered experiences of discrimination.

While labour market instabilities and gender discrimination were influential in prompting migrants such as Jacinto and Helena to leave, with social networks often providing the essential conduits, OLAs also exercised significant “transnational exit and mobility power” (Alberti 2014). But with OLAs not necessarily employed in the most exploitative sectors of their home labour markets, their migration from Latin America represented what Katz (2004) would identify as “reworking”; they were enacting more than “resilience” in the face of unfreedoms and making some effort to assert dignity (see also Waite et al 2015). Given their inability to challenge wider power structures, not least because migration to Europe often entailed a deterioration in occupational mobility (see below), or engage in any collective acts of “resistance”, these movements can be viewed as a form of “reworking” through “onward precarity”. This encompasses their mobility represented as an agentic reworking of their precarious circumstances back home, which is also tempered by the continued precarity they face on arrival in southern Europe to which the discussion now turns.

Onward Precarity in Southern Europe

The nature of precarity among OLAs in southern Europe was primarily related to exploitative labour market experiences and deskilling, negotiations around immigration status and housing problems (see also Mas Giralt 2017). In terms of the broad pattern of arrivals among OLAs in London, Spain was the most common previous country of residence (80 per cent)

followed by Italy (9 per cent) and then Portugal (5 per cent). Within Spain, most came from large cities, especially Madrid (39 per cent), Barcelona (12 per cent) and Valencia (11 per cent). While 96 per cent of Colombians and Bolivians, 94 per cent of Ecuadorians, and 89 per cent of Peruvians moved from Spain, Brazilians were more likely to have moved from Italy (41 per cent) and Portugal (29.5 per cent).

A key dimension of onward precarity on arrival from Latin America entailed downward occupational mobility regardless of educational background. In Spain, for example, the National Immigrant Survey showed that one in five migrants had completed tertiary education, yet around half did not obtain a qualified job upon arrival (Bunge 2014:13). Among OLAs in London, only 14 per cent worked in qualified occupations in their last job in Europe before migrating, of which only 11 per cent were professional and managerial; the majority worked in restaurant services (12 per cent), cleaning (12 per cent), care (8 per cent), and construction (5 per cent) among others. For example, 27 year old Cesar from Bolivia had been a chauffeur back home but he worked in construction when he first arrived in Spain when he was 17 years old, before moving on to several cleaning jobs before securing a position as a security guard in a gated community. Although he earned quite a good salary when he first arrived, he ran into problems because of his insecure immigration status, which worsened as the recession hit:

“It’s very difficult to give an illegal person a contract and as a result they exploit you a little. I got a contract in the security firm but they paid me less and I had to work more. I worked 12 hours at night to earn 1000 when before I earned the same for 7.”

Yet Cesar earned more in construction than he had in Bolivia and despite the occupational mobility challenges he faced because of his immigration status, he still managed to improve his position over time through moving jobs (Alberti 2014) reflecting some attempt to challenge his precarity through “resilience” tactics (Katz 2004). Similarly, Esmeralda, 39 from Colombia had worked as a teacher before she moved to Spain. Arriving as a tourist, it took four years to regularise her status during which time she worked in various cleaning and factory jobs. However, when she secured legal status in 2002 she found it even harder to get a qualified job as she was deemed as more expensive in a contracting labour market, together being “culturally read” and in effect, racially discriminated against as a Latino manual worker (Kelly and Lusi 2006):

“Before, I had lots of jobs, different cleaning jobs in offices and houses. After, I only had my work in the cafeteria ... although there are lots of foreigners they reject you. For the Spanish, we are not educated and are only manual labour to clean, to work in factories ... Once I went to a factory to leave my CV for a receptionist job and they told the cleaning job interviews were the day before.”

Esmeralda found it difficult to develop reworking tactics, but rather focused on incrementally on “resilience” tactics trying to obtain better working conditions through moving from cleaning to working in a café, even if the receptionist job was closed to her because of racism. Indeed, although there was an abundance of jobs for migrants in Spain prior to 2008, albeit ones that rarely matched OLAs’ experience and educational profile, this changed with the economic recession which affected Spain and migrants especially hard (McIlwaine and Datta 2014). While this was partly because they tended to work in sectors most susceptible to economic crisis such as construction, agriculture and care work (Ramos 2017), it was also linked with deskilling and racism (also McIlwaine 2012).

While this led to some return migration, especially between 2010 and 2015 when more people migrated from the EU to Latin America than vice versa for the first time in 14 years, it also resulting in burgeoning onward flows to other countries within Europe (OIM 2015:5-6). In the current case, onward movement was not planned when people left Latin America; when they first arrived in Europe, only 6 per cent of OLAs planned to move on, with 43 per cent planning to return and another 31 per cent anticipating remaining. Their onward movement was mainly prompted by changing economic circumstances linked with unemployment and lack of opportunities (61 per cent), lack of professional potential and the desire to start a business (8 per cent). Although economic factors dominated these decision-making processes, family networks were crucial in choosing London over other destinations (43 per cent). Miguel’s case exemplifies a range of these; he was 49, from Ecuador and had lived in Spain from 2000 until 2009 after which he moved to London:

“The company I worked for went bankrupt due to the economic situation in construction in Spain. The company started to make people redundant until my turn came. I was then in a situation where I could ask for unemployment benefits for a period of time or ask for money to start my own business. I took the second option

and bought a van thinking I could do delivery jobs. I then started working for a company that delivered supplies to bars, however, this company also went bankrupt. I'd had enough and thought 'I can't take it anymore'. My sister-in-law then suggested we come here as there was work and I didn't think twice."

The reasons why OLAs moved to London depended on their life course position, their socio-economic status and whether they had an EU passport (Ahrens et al 2016; Ramos 2017). However, the majority were prompted by the recession which entailed not just job losses but also the collapse of the mortgage and housing markets reflecting precarity in its broadest sense (Ettlinger 2007:320). For many, onward migration was a reactive coping mechanism or tactic in the face of the economic and housing crisis (Mas Giralt 2017) as 34 year old Teodora from the Dominican Republic noted:

"Everything was bankrupt; there was no construction work, no jobs and no way out of the ruin ... when his [husband] state benefits ran out we had no choice, we were desperate, we came to London. We couldn't go home as it was worse and we'd lost our flat in Spain."

Teodora's decision was facilitated by the fact that she had regularised her immigration status and had a Spanish passport yet it was an involuntary choice made in the context of considerable unfreedom. Others made constrained choices to improve their situation for future generations as part of a wider intergenerational migration project (Bastia and McGrath 2011). Valeria from Peru whose three green grocer shops went bankrupt in Spain, for instance, decided not to return home but to go to London: "so that my children could learn more English ... become bilingual, to improve their prospects" (see also McIlwaine 2012). Therefore, onward precarity in Spain is different from that prompting OLAs to leave Latin America. While exploitative labour relations continue to be central, onward precarity is further reinforced by economic recession, deskilling, racial discrimination and the housing crisis. Although OLAs managed to cope with these challenges in situ through a series of "resilience" tactics, it was not until the economic recession hit that they actively "reworked" their situation and migrated to London, albeit again within a context of unfreedom (Mas Giralt 2017; see Waite et al 2015).

Onward precarity in the UK

Precarity is especially dynamic among onward migrants, transforming in complex ways as they move from one country to another and being negotiated through various agentic tactics. Among OLAs in the UK, onward migration was facilitated by an EU passport which was invariably attained as an active strategy for ensuring freedom of mobility throughout the continent (McIlwaine 2012). The vast majority of OLAs (87 per cent) moved after recession hit in Spain, facilitated by EU citizenship. OLAs were most likely to have Spanish passports (80 per cent), followed by Italian (10 per cent) and Portuguese (4 per cent). Nine out of ten had the right to live and work with an EU or British passport (3 per cent with the latter); only 1.3 per cent had no legal documents. This was in contrast with the previous flows of Latin Americans to London where almost 20 per cent had no legal papers which greatly exacerbated their vulnerability (McIlwaine 2015).

The fact that OLAs had legal rights might suggest that they could circumvent the most severe forms of exploitation in the labour market experienced by irregular migrants (McIlwaine 2015) and which can lead to intense forms of hyper-precarity and forced labour (Lewis et al, 2015). Yet, on arrival in London, OLAs still experienced marked downward occupational mobility through concentration in elementary employment, especially in cleaning where conditions are poor (McIlwaine et al 2011). Indeed, 66 per cent worked in cleaning on arrival compared to only around 1 per cent back home and 10 per cent in their previous European country; in contrast, only 4 per cent were employed in professional and managerial positions. These patterns were differentiated by gender, age and household structures; slightly more men than women working in cleaning on arrival (67 per cent compared with 63 per cent), along with those over 40 (73 per cent) and those with children (77 per cent). However, English language attainment was the most important factor in that only 20 per cent who spoke very good English worked in cleaning on arrival compared with 84 per cent of those who spoke limited English (rarely is English required in cleaning jobs – Wills et al 2010).

OLAs' initial labour market experiences in London therefore signalled a significant precarisation in their circumstances especially when compared with their pre-economic crisis occupational status in Europe and Latin America. Onward precarity on arrival revolved heavily around inability to speak English and what Bourdieu calls 'institutional cultural capital' whereby migrants' labour market integration is limited by their ability to use their educational qualifications, language skills or other embodied capital such as

accents, race or ethnicity – collectively known as symbolic capital (McIlwaine 2012). While this affected them in Europe, language aptitude, cultural familiarity and healthy labour demand had previously cushioned many from having to work in the lowest echelons of the labour market. For example, 35-year-old Milena from Brazil had worked in clothes factories back home and ran a café before moving to Italy where she again worked in a factory. She left Italy when she lost her job because of the economic crisis yet she ended up working in cleaning:

“Well, I had never worked as a cleaner, and there are many educated people who are doing this, and people leave Brazil without any idea about this. They had an education in Brazil and come here to clean toilets. So when I got the cleaning job, all I knew was that I'd have to clean offices, the desks, and toilets.”

Reflecting on why OLAs still experienced exploitative conditions in London's labour market despite their secure immigration status, this relates partly to language proficiency meaning that the only jobs open to non-English speakers on arrival are in cleaning, coupled with the fact that their co-ethnic job networks are other among Latin Americans where cleaning continues to dominate occupationally. In turn, those with irregular status are being pushed to the margins of the labour market in the face of the increasingly hostile immigration regime such that cleaning is only open to those with secure status unlike in the past where it was easier to work without papers (McIlwaine and Datta 2014).

In terms of the specific conditions experienced in contract cleaning jobs, most OLAs were poorly paid with limited social protection (see also Wills et al 2010). Usually involving cleaning offices for large multinational cleaning companies, this type of work is fragmented into short periods of time in the morning and evening, usually in two or three hour slots. This usually means that people have to secure multiple jobs to get by; 35 per cent of OLAs reported having more than one job with 9 per cent having three or four jobs as noted by Tito who was Bolivian:

“I work in the early morning from 5 to 7-30am, then I have nothing until 4 to 6 at the school. I'm there for 4.5 hours, then later I have my job at Old Street that's for 2 hours, then that's 6.5 hours, then another hour in Green Park ... it's hard to live under such pressure, I don't like it”.

While wages usually met the National Minimum Wage of £6.31 per hour at the time of survey with an hourly income of £7.00, three-quarters of OLAs earned *less* than the London Living Wage (LLW) of £8.80 (80 per cent of all Londoners earned *more* than the LLW - McIlwaine and Bunge 2016). Many also complained about not being paid for work carried out (22 per cent), working without a contract (14 per cent) and being made to do the work of another person for the same money (13 per cent). Other problems included lack of benefits as noted by Jacinto who worked for London Underground as a cleaner without a contract: “If I get ill, I would have to leave the job. If I got flu, I wouldn’t be able to go to the doctor because I would lose a day’s work and I wouldn’t be paid; I don’t have any guarantees where I work”. A large proportion (45 per cent) reported experiencing problems in the workplace, especially women (48 per cent). While cleaning was the most precarious employment, similar conditions were found in other jobs. Luciana from Argentina who was a waitress in a hotel complained of consistent under-payment:

“I signed a contract for 45 hours per week but then they gave me my rota which had 12 and 14 hour days, which were double days ... when I received my wages, they hadn’t added the extra hours. They only paid me for 45 hours not 63 hours which I had worked. When I complained, they told me that’s how it works in all restaurants in London”.

However, as noted above, precarity and especially labour market experiences are rarely static. Indeed, there was some evidence of OLAs exercising occupational mobility power to leave the precarious cleaning sector (Alberti 2014), although this was differentiated by gender, English language aptitude and indebtedness. Indeed, the proportion of OLAs working in cleaning in London declined over time from 66 per cent on arrival to 50 per cent at the time of survey. However, movement out of cleaning was difficult with almost three-quarters (73 per cent) who were cleaning in their first job still worked in the sector at the time of survey. Occupational mobility was gendered and strongly influenced by language aptitude in that women were more likely to move out of the sector than men (34 per cent compared with only 20 per cent) as well as those who spoke very good English (77 per cent compared to 24 per cent whose English was limited). In turn, the longer the residence, the greater the likelihood of moving out of cleaning (see also Akresh 2008). Nelson from Colombia, for example, who had a large fruit and vegetable business back home, had

worked in construction in Spain. Although he worked in cleaning on arrival because he could not speak English, after two years he secured a job as a chef in a hotel. While it was not easy, he noted: “it’s not great pay but the timetable is good for my daughter as I can look after her during the day ... and soon I hope to learn more English and get a better job.”

Yet onward migrants still found it difficult to secure jobs commensurate with their qualifications; only 9 per cent worked in professional and managerial roles at the time of survey, with few owning their own business (1.5 per cent) or being self-employed (9 per cent). Together with low wages, this was also linked with lack of financial capital given that many left Spain impoverished, often owing money for unpaid mortgages. Indeed, over half had borrowed money since they left home and almost half still had this debt, much of which was linked with mortgage defaults in Spain. This was further exacerbated by a sense of competition among onward arrivals and established Latin Americans, the latter who had developed their “diversity dividend” to counteract their otherwise disadvantaged position in London’s labour market with 10 per cent running small businesses many of which were retail outlets situated in Latin American spaces in the city such as Elephant and Castle shopping centre (McIlwaine et al 2011:58). Indeed, 68 percent noted that there was discrimination among Latin Americans (see Garapich 2008 on hostilities between old and new flows of Polish migrants). José who worked as a cleaner complained that Latin Americans who had come directly accused those from Spain of “being lazy because they can get benefits, they’ve not had to suffer without having papers. This has created rivalry, division among us. They ignore that we have suffered too”.

Therefore, despite their privileged entry into the UK, OLAs’ employment experiences in London were not only precarious and exploitative, but also the worst of all their experiences compared to their work back home and in Europe. As Miriam from Ecuador who was a social worker back home and had worked as a secretary in Spain noted of her job in office cleaning in London:

“It’s terrible. The work I have now you could not compare with even the worst job that a migrant in Spain could get; it’s worse than the work in agriculture there. At least those jobs aren’t humiliating, never ... it’s the worst job of my life.”

Labour precarity was also accompanied and exacerbated by wider precarity of living in London. In addition to indebtedness, many OLAs also lived in poor housing conditions. For example, almost half (47 per cent) shared their accommodation with other families or individuals and almost one-third (30.5 per cent) stated that their housing was overcrowded. As Valeria from Peru recounted of her housing on arrival:

“We lived in one room the four of us, two children, my husband and me and it was awful; my children were three and one and half and one fell down the stairs, and the bathroom, no, no. We shared a bathroom and a kitchen with other families; there were vermin, small rats and it was terrible.”

Onward precarity in London was therefore somewhat paradoxical. Despite the privileges of citizenship rights and extensive exercise of agentic tactics, albeit within constrained circumstances, OLAs experienced their most precarious working and living conditions. However, many also spoke positively about London; while 37.5% wanted to stay in London, only 17 percent wanting to go home and 20 percent to move back to Europe. In turn, only a third felt there was discrimination against Latin Americans, mainly in the labour market (compared with 70 percent noted in 2011 among Latin Americans as a whole - McIlwaine et al 2011:9). Women tended to be more likely to identify discrimination than men (37 percent compared with 31 percent), yet they were also more likely than men to state that they were happy to have moved to the city (68 percent compared with 59 percent). Although many women faced considerable challenges in London in terms of gender-based violence in the workplace and the home (McIlwaine 2010), many also noted the greater levels of freedom, especially compared to their homeland and Spain. Esmeralda, for example, said that although she left her teaching in Colombia she said she could never have progressed there:

“I could never have had my family and a job back home because of machismo, I couldn’t have put up with it ... but in Spain they don’t like pregnant women working either ... but here there is more equality, only cleaning jobs, but more equality”.

Gendered experiences also intersected with racial in that OLAs repeatedly spoke of London being much less racist than Spain. Teodora noted: “I like London much more than Madrid because the English people are not racist. Spanish people are racist; they push you in the buses and call you ‘black whore’.” OLAs therefore had an important transnational lens on

their lives provided by their onward migration trajectories that provided a spatio-temporal optic by the time they arrived in London. Precarity had already underpinned their lives in diverse and dynamic ways in relation to labour markets, housing, and gender and racial inequalities. Yet by virtue of being in London, OLAs had already developed and instituted a range of agentic tactics revolving around “resilience” and “reworking” through occupational mobility in situ in Europe and London, as well as through migrating at least twice. Arguably, their onward spatio-temporal perspective allowed them to develop resilience tactics in the short-term with a view to reworking and even resistance over the longer term. Indeed, there is evidence of Latin Americans in London collectively organising in impressive ways around employment and migrant rights (Alberti and Peró 2018; McIlwaine and Bermudez 2011).

Conclusions

This paper has explored the nature of what we refer to as “onward precarity” among Latin American migrants as they have moved transnationally from their homelands to southern Europe and onwards to London. As onward migration is becoming the “new normal” across the world and especially in Europe, this paper contributes to debates around clarifying the relationships between precarity and mobility from a holistic spatio-temporal perspective. In highlighting the dynamic ways in which precarity in the labour market and beyond is experienced transnationally by Latin American migrants who negotiate multiple borders and labour markets, we show how it does not occur in linear but in fractal ways. While the discussion shows that employment precariousness among migrants is dynamic and can reflect various forms of free and unfree labour along a continuum, it moves beyond this perspective. It does this through an emphasis on onward migrants who have settled immigration rights, who have worked across a wide range of occupational sectors in different countries and who have also experienced precarity beyond the labour market in gendered and racialized ways. Onward precarity therefore captures how migrants experience intersecting vulnerabilities, and to a lesser extent improvements, in holistic spatio-temporal ways. Onward precarity is thus multidimensional and entails not just escaping precarity in one place, but negotiating it in different structural economic and institutional contexts in three parts of the globe, two different immigration regimes and across three key temporal periods.

This negotiation takes multiple forms of “resistance within unfreedom” (Waite et al 2015) through various local and transnational practices (Datta et al 2007). These constrained agentic

tactics vary by place but revolve around Katz's (2004) resilience and reworking strategies both in situ and across time and space. Rarely are power structures challenged but rather onward migrants manage to traverse and manipulate to a greater and lesser extent wider structures, especially through mobilities, and which are mediated by gender, race and other factors such as cultural capital through language aptitude. Onward precarity is therefore not uniformly negative (Miller 2017), and can reflect some form of exercising agency, albeit within conditions of constraint. The case of OLAs in London also shows that complex trade-offs are made as they move across complex spatialities and temporalities. Although OLAs arrive in the city with privileged immigration status, for instance, this does not translate into advantages in labour or housing markets. Yet, they develop compromises which shift according to their gender and ethnic position as well as their various cultural capital attributes. It is likely that these negotiations will continue into the future as OLAs deal with the fall-out of BREXIT; their privileged immigration status is again being challenged in situ and it remains to be seen how this plays out for Latin Americans into the future.

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